THE

AERONAUT:

VOL. 7.

No. 121, October, 6, 1817.

IT is not without some degree of self-congratulation, that we commence a seventh volume of our lucubrations. The work which in its commencement scarcely afforded a hope of a continuance of any duration now swells upon our hands, and promises to become as voluminous as our most sanguine wishes could desire. But we make no prophecies, we issue no promises. We know not what a day may bring forth; & the hope that is now so exultant, may be extinguished by means allo-

16588

gether uncontrolable by human exertion. In the enjoyment of health, of youth, of literary ardor in some degree, lovely are the prospects that now rise upon our eyes; — the sadness of declining years, or the darkness of the silent tomb, may prove that our hopes were illusory, & our calculations in vain. But it behoves us, at the commencement of every volume, to thank that providence who has preserved us, for permitting another period to be added to our lives; and to bear in mind the uncertainty of the future, and the utter futility of making any calculations with respect to our subsequent course, which experience & time may blast & disappoint.

Indeed, it may be assumed as a general principle, founded on universal experience, that the habit of scheming, or preconceiving plans for future aggrandisement or future employment, is dangerous and unhappy in its consequences. It is seldom, very seldom, that circumstances turn out as we could wish them. The

mind that is always scheming, too often beholds the blasts of disappointment wither the prospect his imagination had conjured up; has to mourn over the past with all the wildness of despair, from which he ceases only to revive more deceitful phantoms, and provide fresh cause for sorrow. Voyagers upon the stormy ocean of life, we are ignorant what sudden whirlwinds may arise, what sunken rocks may ruin. Why not rather proceed with caution along, adventuring into no perilous seas, but trusting to Him who will provide a chart to direct & a compass to guide our voyage through every threatened danger?

In the calm pleasures of a secluded & literary life there is perhaps a charm which few other employments declare. Removed at once from the bustle and the crimes of men, the mind is enabled to pursue its gentle career, with scarce a pang to disturb the stillness of its repose. The schemes of presumptuous

ambition, the stings of corroding envy, the pangs of hatred, and the incentives of avarice, ought there to be excluded. like the impure from the temples of old. The threshold of the dome of literature ought to be sacred. When thus situated, the occupation of a literary man is indeed desirable. Searching into the lore of time, he culls those flowers, whose beauty and whose fragrance are destined to adorn the community of which he is a member. Abstracted from the turmoil of public life, it is mind alone that occupies his attention, and directs his pursuits. He is a denizen of all past times and nations. He holds familiar converse with all that have lived of good, & great, and mighty among mankind. The great volume of nature, the page of history, the scroll of departing ages, lie open before his observation.

Upon a brief and general review of such a situation as this, it would seem that here at least was a means of escaping those dangers

which we have pointed out, and of passing life with tranquillity and repose. But alas! man, wherever he is, and whatsoever his condition may be, is still human. The passions that ought to be banished from the grove of academus are too often intruders upon their holy shades. The pangs of authorship have been too poignant for any but the theorist to calculate upon the absolute pleasure of such a life. Disappointment and malignant criticism have blasted in many instances the brightest hopes. The cold-blooded envy that assails from without, festers likewise upon the heart's core within; and no jealousy is so rancorous, so determined, and so deadly, as the jealousy of authors. Ambition has some of its most daring votaries amid the solitudes of letters; and every means is put in requisition to attain the object of the heart's unbounded desires.

Again; - pleasing as may appear the simple employments of an author, they are not in fact so enchanting. The silver streams of poesy, with all that delights the imagination, and warms the heart, do not always pour for him their luxuriancy. The man that looks at literature in the abstract only regards its embellishments; he roams along the flowery and beautiful garden, delighted at every turn, and admiring the taste and ~~order~~ the employment of its cultivator; but he forgets the labor that was bestowed upon it, he sees not the days & months of toil bestowed upon its cultivation. In like manner, when an author ventures forth a new work, which lays at once hold of every feeling of the reader, & keeps him enchained with admiration, none but himself is conscious of what it cost him. To

him the ghosts of vanished days, the remembrance of toil, and suffering, and anxiety, of mornings of unremitted exertion, and of nights spent over the dim & sickly lamp; — to him all these things rise up to check the glow of exultation, and tell him that too often poor is the reward for all that he has endured. The flowers he presents are lovely even in his own eyes; but he feels that they plucked with unwearied toil from regions attainable by no common exertions. And yet the sufferings of authors are daily set at nought; their complaints are laid to the score of moping melancholy and sedentary occupations. The slave that works in the darkness & dampness and solitude of the mine, excites no commiseration from his fellow-mortals, when he holds up to their view the gem he has rescued from [redacted]

its dreamy hiding place. The prize he discloses excites & draws forth their admiration, but the difficulty of its attainment forms no part of their consideration.

But perhaps we are going too far, and our readers may be tempted to exclaim, who of our countrymen has thus toiled & is thus rewarded? But upon the other hand, we would ask, what is a real author? Is it one who merely takes up letters as a relaxation from business, as a source of amusement; or is it one who spends each moment of his life in the endeavor to acquire information & dispense it around? Undoubtedly, the latter; and we make little hesitation in saying that our own country has not produced an author of this stamp. Those who have wielded the pen in America, have amused themselves upon the outworks, not

stormed the citadel; have aspired after the laurel, but could not venture on its perils. And besides all this, we have no really learned men in the country, even amongst the divines. That blaze of information which streams upon the learned of Europe, is unknown to us; & we are therefore obliged to be contented with second-rate acquirements, and of course with second rate performances. What Doctor Joseph Warton said of Bishop Warburton may with more truth and justice be said ~~—~~ of our literary (we will not call them learned) men, that as they cannot reach the stream of Ilissus, nor the fountain of Hippocrene, and there drink copiously, they are glad to take a draught of classical water from the reservoirs of others. Deficient in the means of ac-

quiring extensive information, owing to the want of those great libraries and institutions so frequent in the eastern world, we can only draw from second-hand sources, and of necessity can be but half-scholars.

But we think we may be permitted to hail the time as approaching, when literature will take a higher stand, and our professional men will become more really learned. We congratulate our countrymen, ~~the~~ on the growing taste for important works which is evident in the community. The frequent republication of works of a standing superior to the common run of ephemeral productions, is of itself a conclusive evidence that there is a demand for them, and that information of a higher rank begins to be relished. It is to be lamented that the principal republications in this country from English works have been in

the lighter departments of literature. The vast crowd of novels, poems, & plays, with other productions of a light kind, has materially contributed to the want of soundness in public opinion of books; has perhaps refined the ideas, but vitiated the taste.

E.